



PASHTUN

CODE OF HONOR

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The Pashtun Code of Honour

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Abstract

This article gives details of the cultural values of the Pakhtun people of Central Asia, especially insofar as gives those of values related to this culture's code of honour influences interpersonal and intercultural behaviours. By drawing extensively upon oral traditions, prose and poetic writings, the authors establish the engines of belief that power social action for this too-little understood culture at a time when such understanding is crucial to Western—and particularly American's involvement in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries in this turbulent part of the world.

US media's interest in the Taliban has led to an associated interest in Pakhtun culture,

though thirty years of civil warfare and cross-border unrest throughout Central Asia have made it nigh impossible to accurately represent the total number of Pashtuns, also called Pakhtun (Paxtun) or Pahtan. Best estimates put the total population of ethnic Pakhtuns at 42 to 52 million people, geographically spread throughout the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, Pakistani Baluchistan, and Eastern and Southern Afghanistan. About two millions Pakhtuns live in Karachi, Pakistan, the largest concentration in a single place.

What follows is a cultural description from within the culture by two academics with strong ties to Pakhtun culture and a third who has written about the subtleties and difficulties of cross-cultural communication. The intent of this article is to put forth some of the general tendencies of this too-poorly understood group, one whose embrace of a particular code of honour means that Westerners consumed by overly generalized notions of the Taliban and other “marked groups” makes the Pakhtun seem unfortunately alien. The Western inability to understand *Pakhtunwali* (the general term for the code of conduct for Pakhtuns and the specific term for the code of honour that guides that conduct) can lead to overly simplistic understanding of this vibrant culture.

Pakhtun cultural practice does not lend itself to an easily understood linear narrative: a rational epistemological grid cannot be imposed on their worldview. The culture is, rather, a unique harmony of contradictions. *Pakhtunwali* is the culture and way of life of the Pakhtuns, in which all the laws relating to social life are present in unwritten form. Though not a religion, but a very sacred code of conduct, Pakhtuns love their Pashto so much that it has almost gained the status of a religion. It is so dear to the Pakhtuns that sometimes and in some special circumstances they call it “The 5th religion,” because most of the Pakhtuns are followers of the four creeds of Islam. So *Pakhtunwali* and its rules can only be understood with reference to the different domains of *Nang* or honour, the basic value of *Pakhtunwali* and a basic characteristic of a Pakhtun personality.

Sharam (shame), *Nang* (Honour), *Peghore* (taunt) and *Badal* (revenge) are the central pillars of the Pakhtun Culture. *Sharam* (shame) includes the disrespect of women, family, relation, community, ethnicity, nationality and culture. The strength of *Nang*, the sense of honour attached to each of these domains, varies according to the situation. This essay will elaborate on each aspect where appropriate; for the moment, poet Ghani Khan (Pathans,n.d._) usefully depicts the character of a typical Pakhtun in the following words: His [Pakhtun, i.e.] temperament, like his clothes, is picturesque and elegant. He loves fighting but hates to be a soldier. He loves music but has a great contempt for the musicians. He is kind and gentle but hates to show it. He has strange principles and peculiar notions. He is hot- blooded and hotheaded and poor and proud. (para. 17)

The Pathan has a tender heart but tries to hide it under a rough and gruff exterior. He is too good a fighter to leave his weakest part uncovered. “Don’t be so sweet,” he says, “that people may swallow: nor so bitter that people may spit you out.” “So he covers his sweetness with bitterness, self-preservation pure and simple. His violent nature, strong

body and tender heart make a very unstable combination for living but an ideal one for poetry and colour. He keeps a rough face “because he does not want you to see his soft eyes. He would rather you thought he was a rogue than let you see him weep his eyes out for his wife. (para. 27)

Being direct and rather thick between the ears, every Pathan imagines he is Alexander the Great and wants the world to admit it. The result is a constant struggle between cousin and cousin, brother and brother, and quite often between father and son. This has provided his sole undoing through the ages. They have not succeeded in being a great nation because there is an autocrat in every home, who would rather burn his own house than see his brother rule it. (para. 108)

He suffers from a pronounced lack of tact and a distinct excess of practical self-expression. He would rather shoot his way out of a problem than get a headache thinking about it. He has great ambition and no patience that is why he usually dies rather young. He has a great heart and a thick head; that is why he makes a charming friend and a fine host. He has a proud head and an empty stomach that is why he is a great dacoit [i.e., a bandit]. (para. 110)

When he has to choose between ransom and alms, he chooses ransom, because he is a man and not a worm. Looks at the torn clothes of his beautiful young wife and the hungry eyes of his child. He picks up rifle and grits his teeth and goes into the jaws of death to procure a yard of cloth for the one and a mouthful of food for the other. When a social system fails to provide for his dear ones, he tramples it down under his grass sandals. When a political arrangement decides to starve him, and over feed another he shoots holes into it. (para. 111)

That is a quality in him, which I admire. He would rather steal than beg. So would I. He would rather face the anger of God and man than the shame and disgrace of poverty. He would rather look into the frightened eyes of a kidnapped merchant than the sad accusing eyes of his ill fed wife and the hungry, hopeful glance of his wretched children. I would rather see a man hang for dacoity than see him crawl along a pavement. It with outstretched palms, asking for alms from those who have found generous buyers for their souls. The Pathan loves to steal because he hates to beg. That is why I love, him, in spite of his thick head and vain heart. He would rather break his head than sell it with that genteel submission so common in civilised man. (Para. 112)

They love life, but only a life with honour. Life is, in fact, subordinated to honour because mere living is considered useless and uselessness is despised. The ideal life is the life of a *Nangyalai*. They are a proud people but like a life which is down to earth. Ghani Khan, the Pashto poet says in one of his couplets that

زه پښتون يم، ستا د مرگه نه ویرېم
خو مې تش ژوندون او خوشي مرگه ته قار شي
(Ghani, 1986, p. 339)

*O`My God, I am a Pakhtun and am not afraid of death, but I abhor mere living and a)
(.death of no use*

Or, as the great Pashto poet Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689) puts it in one of his couplets,

مرګ زما په پوهه ښه تر دا ژوندون دے
د عزت سره چې نه وي زیست روزگار
(In Kamil, 1960, p. 528)

(To me death is far better than life, if mere living is not with respect and honour.)

This—the couplet, the aphorism—is not merely a literary tradition within Pashto poetry, but clues to the life mottos of every true Pakhtun. Pashto literature and Pashto folklore describe and define this code with clarity, so the linkage between language and culture is especially strong in this case: Pashto is not only the name of their language but the name of their code of conduct as well. Pashto is the foundation of the culture, and only Pakhtunwali who can live a life according to the laws and rules of Pakhtunwali are qualified to be called Pakhtun. Dr. Charles Lindholm comments on the values of Pakhtunwali in these words:

This code is far more complex than that hypothesized by Hobbs, and covers behaviour on all public occasions. The demands of this code are well known to all, and provide a charter for public action which both ratifies the necessity of the social structure and conceals its contradictions. It is by reference to Pakhtunwali that the villager will define himself and his culture to outsiders, and it is by adherence to Pakhtunwali that a man makes his claim to a place of dignity among his peers. (1982, p. 210)

Though honour is a separate value of the Pakhtun culture, all the values of Pakhtunwali derive from their code of honour. All norms, values, traditions and practices fall under the comprehensive system of Pakhtunwali, which is reflected in family, clan and tribal behaviours. The term Pakhtunwali is derived from the term Pakhtun and Pashtun from Pashto, which might be said to be comprised of the following according to some scholars:

- (پ) *Pey* (Pashto letter *Pat*), which means honour, fellowship or comradeship. (*)

سر دې درومي، مال دې درومي، پټ دې نه ځي
د سړي د چارې کل خوبي په پټ ده

Let the head be gone, wealth be gone but the honour must not go, because the whole of)
(Khushal in Kamil, 1960, p. 281)(. *dignity of a man is due to this honour*

- (ښ) *Xeen or Sheen* (Pashto letter for *Xegarha*), which means doing good to others or the needy.

چې د خلقو نیک خواهي لري په زړه کښې
مبارک شه بادشاهي لري په زړه کښې

If you have a passion in your heart for doing well to others, congratulations! You keep a)
(Khushal in Kamil, 1960, p. 379)(. *kingdom in your heart*

- (ت) *Tey* for *Toora*, which literally means sword and stands for bravery.

چي او نه وهي په دواړه لاسه توري
چا ملگونه په ميراث نه دي موندلي

Unless one fights with swords in both of his hands, no one has won the counties mere by)
(Khushal in Kamil, 1960, p. 874)(.hereditary

- (و) *Waw* for *Wafa*, which means fidelity to one's commitments.
- (ن) *Noon* for *Nang*, which means honour.

From this point of view, the essence or meaning of the term "Pakhtun" resides in commitments to chivalry, courage, fidelity, and honour, so these are the qualities that shape the character of Pakhtun society.

In addition, other useful concepts and terms (and their Pashto equivalents) include hospitality (*melmastia*), the Council of Elders (*Jirga*), modesty (*sharam*, *haya*), revenge (*badal*), taunting (*peghor*), seeking forgiveness in a feud (*nanawati*), the honour of the family (*nang*, *namoos*), and zeal, courage, or manliness (*ghairat*).

(*) Note:- *In fact these are attributes, not original meanings*)

Comradeship, doing well to others, bravery, fidelity and honour are also fundamental values of Pakhtun Culture; however, explanations of each and of the historical events related to them are outside the scope of this brief overview. Such an effort requires explication of a whole philosophy of life. The general point however, is that these values have given a special character to the Pakhtuns, values reflected in their customs, traditions and worship.

Cultural Aspect of Pakhtunwali

Nang and *Naamoos* are the Pashto words synonymous for honour, though each has a wider scope of meaning than the English word "honour" itself. *Nang* is a basic characteristic of Pakhtun nature and character, giving meaning to a Pakhtun's life. In fact, as a value of Pakhtunwali as well, *Nang* is comfortably considered as the central pillar of the Pakhtun culture. (Pakhtunwali is sometimes called Pashto, referring not only to language and ethnic identity but also to an honourable way of life.) Pashto can be individual as well as collective. It starts from one's self; family and *Tabar* (clan or extended family) are the fundamental spheres of a Pakhtun's *Nang*. Keeping the honour of the immediate family is the first and foremost duty of every good Pakhtun, but as in other hierarchically oriented cultures, there is a scale that flows from *Tabar*: *wrorwali*, brethren; then *Azizwali*, blood relatives; *Tarburwali*, cousinship; *Kaliwali*, the village community; *Qaumwali*, ethnic nationalism; and, finally Pakhtunwali, *Pakhtunwala*, or Pakhtunness. *Pakhtunwala* is the essence of Pakhtunness and contains all the cultural demand of Pakhtunwali. Different customs and traditions are reflective of these values, but every good Pakhtun is bound to observe these values in order to achieve the quality of a true *Nangyalai*.

Nang has different manifestations. If the life of a Pakhtun is devoted to honour, he has to

win it by all means, and it must be won, even though if life is at stake.

The concept of honour among the Pakhtuns seems sometimes confusing to outsiders, but there is no confusion for a Pakhtun in understanding its proper role. Though it flows from the family and reaches to the *Nang* of Pashto anywhere in the world, sometimes in emergencies priorities change according to the demands of the situation. Affairs within society are dealt with according to the nature of Pashto. For example, it is the norm that family relationships are the highest priority for an act of *Nang*, but when a situation of national or Pakhtun honour arises, the priority changes. Khushal Khan Khattak has written that

جهان شرم نام و ننگ دے.....کټه دا نه وي جهان رنګ دے

*The world is all but shame, good name and honour; if there is no honour the world is)
(Khushal in Kamil, 1960, p. 351) (.but naught*

Here the concept of honour is attached to the concept of shame, though this “shame” has a culturally bound meaning in Pakhtunwali that is not literally equivalent to the generalized English term. The Pakhtun code of honour is established with three other important codes of the culture: shame, taunt and revenge. Shame is modesty, which is the characteristic of every Pakhtun, but its real meaning is most readily seen in the modesty of Pakhtun women, where a sort of Purda is compulsory in daily life. Purda is neither seclusion nor covering the face only. There are domestic and other affairs and matters which are the sole domain of women, and neither they nor men are allowed to interfere. If modesty (propriety, decorum, discretion) is violated then a situation of disgrace arises and shame leads to taunt: taunting incites—in fact requires—an act of revenge, after which honour is somewhat restored. There are some affairs of shame and revenge which are taken to the Jirga to decide: the Jirga is in fact a council of elders basically formed for the restoration of honour of the affectee, though this council also makes decisions in other matters as well. Not taking revenge by victim’s family could lead to social rejection. . . norms are social because other people enforce them, by expressing approval or, especially, disapproval. These sanctions can be very strong. . . In societies with a strict code of honour, the ostracism suffered by a person who fails to avenge an offense can be crippling. In addition to being supported by the attitudes of other people, norms are also sustained by the feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, guilt, and shame that a person suffers by the prospect of violating them. . . emotions can also provide a positive emotion for following the norms. In my opinion, the emotive aspect of norms is fundamental. I do not deny that norms can have the cognitive function of coordinating expectations, nor that they can be understood as systems of sanctions. Yet if norms can regulate expectations and behaviour it is ultimately because they have a grip on the mind that is due to the strong emotions they can trigger. (Elster, 1990, p. 864).

Loss of face is irreconcilable with Pakhtunwali. According to Goffman (1955) and others, A person may experience embarrassment or blushing when the person perceives his/her face has been discredited in a particular encounter. Embarrassment felt by a person could disrupt the interaction, and thus, the person and the other participants have vested interest

in protecting the person's face to keep the social encounter smooth. Goffman called this effort to maintain or to save face facework. (Cited in Kim & Nam, 1998, p. 523)

Face is lost when the individual, either through his action or that of people closely related to him, fails to meet essential requirements placed upon him by virtue of the social position he occupies. (Yau-fai Ho, 1976, p. 866)

Face may be lost when conduct or performance falls below the minimum level considered acceptable or when certain vital or essential requirements, as functions of one's social position, are not satisfactorily met. (Ibid., p. 871).

Response to loss of face is contextually determined:

Context is defined as the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event. According to Hall (1983), information, context and meaning are related together in a balanced and functional way. The more information is stored in the context, the less is needed to express in explicit communication, and vice versa, the less information is stored in the context, the more there is a need to express information explicitly in communication (Nevgi et al., p. 3, 2008). How the information and the context are related can be understood by the examples of everyday life. People belonging to the same family may use fewer words in mutual communication, because they have learned to interpret each other's behaviour non-verbally. They share information embedded in the common family context. In discussion, strangers need exact articulation to help them to understand the meaning of the message because they do not share information in the context of the communication situation. (in Nevgi et al., 2008, p. 4).

Without going into excruciating detail, key terms are recounted as follows, with some elaboration of the terms' relationships to one another: *Nang* or "honour" is the highest term or value of Pakhtun ethics; so is the term shame, which concerns the code of Pakhtun ethics, while *Peghore* or taunt is related to tradition, an adherence to the cultural life. Thus, *Nang* means honour, but it also means bashfulness, modesty, shame, care of what is sacred and inviolable, courage, indignation, ardor, zeal, concern for what one is bound to defend, affection, humanity, generosity, urbanity, affability, benevolence and manhood, etc.

So *Nang* has a broad scope of meaning, generally synonymous with the Pashto term *Pat*, which denotes the preservation of self respect and the overall dignity of self.

Honourlessness and shamelessness are harshly dealt with in this culture because such actions—or refusal of actions—lead to continuous feuds and enmity. Respect for women is an absolute requirement; dishonouring any woman is an unpardonable crime in Pakhtunwali. All other social issues are resolved by the a Jirga, though punishment for the disrespect of a female is not necessarily taken to Jirga as any person of the tribe is permitted to punish the offender. Since honour involves a very serious code of ethics, its restrictions are seriously observed. Those who are obliged to uphold *Nang* are called *Nangylee*, and Khushal Khan Khattak says

مړني دي چې يادېږي په سندرو هم په وير

Khushal in) (*Braves are those who are remembered in the songs and during moarning*) (Kamil, 1960 p. 80

Thus, *Pakhtunwali* is a collective code of honour that binds and obligates every Pakhtun, and *Nang*, or honour, is its highest-order responsibility:

Honour implies the sensitive domain of personal or self respect, the reputation of those related, the love of land and chastity of the women. Any violation of honour is to be avenged and may spark off self-perpetuating blood feuds. People unable to protect their honour are looked down upon. Therefore, sometimes a collective action by the community is taken to restore the honour of the down-trodden for the common good of the society. (Haq, n.d.)

As stated above, *Nang* has a multi-dimensional value, one that implies the honour of the land, tribe and women, and adherence to it is a symbol of honour. Pakhtuns attend to the honour of others because if one is unable to care for the honour of another, one is incapable of keeping his own honour. Classical Pashto poet Abdul Hameed Baba has written that

چې د بل ننګ و ناموس ساتلې نشي
و به نه ساتي څوک خپل ننګ و ناموس

Those who can not protect the honour of others will not be able to keep their own)
(Hameed, 1958, p. 39) (*honour*)

A person who is unable to protect his honour is defamed by being called *Moozi* or *Benanga* in Pashto. For example, the historic battle of Maiwand, in which the British fought and were defeated by the Pakhtuns in 1880, was won by this taunt, below, by a woman, Malalai, who sung it in a Pashto *tappa* during the retreat of Durrani from the battle field. (*Tappa* is a form of folk poetry, usually with no authorial ownership. (It is written in free verse, the first line of which has nine syllables, the second thirteen.)

که په میوند کېنې شهید نه شوې
گرانه لا لیه یې ننګی له دې ساتینه

O my beloved! If you couldn't be martyred in the Maiwand, you are kept for Benangi or)
(*dishonour*)

Upon hearing this *tappa*, the Afghans returned to battle and fought so bravely that they won the war. Another more-recent historical example of honour as spur to cultural action can be seen in the uprising of the Pakhtuns against the British during the Malakand Expedition and the siege of Chitral (1895-97), which is referred to in the context of this Pashto *tappa*:

چرته انګرېز چرته چترال دے
بې ننګي زور شوه انګرېزان چترال ته ځینه

Where the British and where Chitral is, but due to the prevalence of Benangi among the)
Chitral is a mountainous and inaccessible](*Pakhtuns, the British are going up to Chitral*
[city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The British forces were besieged in Chitral and the whole of Malakand Division was at war with British forces. Sir Winston Churchill's book, *The Story of Malakand Field Force*, refers to the relentlessness of Pashto revolts/insurrections.

Shame has different standards in *Pakhtunwali*, some of which can be resolved by paying a monetary or other penalty, but the shame of a woman is not forgiven. Sher Muhammad Khan writes that

Sharam literally means shame. In tribal customs and usages it is a payment made by *parh* (i.e., the guilty) to his opponent. Mostly *sharam* is given for moral offences such as insulting a woman, disgracing a maraka (Council) member or rejecting *nanawate* or not honouring *parhrunay* (i.e., women who beg pardon), etc. Money or *psa* (a male goat or lamb) is given in *sharam*. *Sharam* has no standard in Narkh (a fixed rate); two or three spin giereys (elders) may determine it. One who refuses to pay *sharam* may be forced to pay *nagha* (a fine) as well as *sharam*. (n.d., 64; emphasis added)

One who is senseless about his honour, does not qualify to wear a turban (Dastaar), the outward symbol of chivalry and Pakhtunness. In his famous book *Dastarnama* (1666), Khushhal Khan Khattak (quoted in Kamil, 1960) writes that the turban is the honour of a man: one who is capable of keeping its honour can wear it. An interesting tradition of the Pakhtuns is the refusal of the bow before anyone in any circumstances: while wearing the turban, he cannot bow or lower his head because the falling of a turban is considered a great shame for a man. The Sufi Poet Amir Hamza Khan Shinwari (1907 to 1994) says in two of his romantic couplets that

ما کوز ورته ليمه کړه زما سر نه ټيټيډه

شايد چې په الفت کېنې هم افغان پاتې کيدم

I lowered my eyes before my beloved, I couldn't bow my head. Perhaps I would have to)
(Shinwari, 2000, in Preface to *Ghazawani*) (.stay Afghan even, in love

دا سرکوزي ټيټنونه عشقه! ولې؟

ستا د زلمو هغه پگړۍ څه شوې

(O! Pakhtun love! Why lowering your heads, where are the turbans of your youths?)

(Shinwari, 2000, in Preface to *Ghazawani*)

Not surprising given the cultural, totemic power of women in this culture, “mother” (*Adey*, *Adakka*, or *Mor*) is a most sacred name for a Pakhtun, one which also has a very romantic meaning. There are many tales, proverbs and folk songs related to mothers, many of which refer to the high degree of cultural value attached to the concept. This one fact is sometimes ignored at great peril by foreign forces who have attacked Pakhtun lands. If the *parhoonai* (piece of cloth that covers head and body of women) of a mother falls from her head, the insult is never forgiven by the Pakhtuns. By extension, this is also the case with the honour of their motherland, a term which is similar to but has wider connotations for the Pakhtun than for many other cultures. Khushhal Khan Khattak writes that

په خپل نام و ننک چې راشم ليوڼې شم

خبردار کله په سود او زيان د لک يم

When it comes to the protection of my honour then my rage does not care about benefits)
(Khushhal in Kamil, 1960, p. 564) (.and deficits of millions

And this honour of name and dignity is naturally attached to national pride, where *Qami Nang*, national honour, is accorded great value among Pakhtuns. A Sufi poet and the King of Pashto *ghazal* (a genre of poetry), Amir Hamza Khan Shinwari, writes in this regard that

نور همه غمونه زه ز غملې شم چې څه وي
بس خو يو غمونه د افغان مه راکوه

*Other griefs do not matter: if you give them to me, I can endure them, but don't give me)
(.the grief of Afghan, which I will not be able to tolerate*

(Shinwari, 2008, p. 325)

This is a continuation of the same tradition which Khushal Kahttak has described:

د افغان په ننيک مې و تړله توره
ننگيالي د زمانې خوشحال ختيک يم

*(I fastened my sword to the honour of the Afghan; I am the one highest upholder of
honour of the era.)* (Khushal in Kamil, 1960, p. 564)

Honour and Revenge

The code of honour of the Pakhtuns is so strong that even in love affairs they have to take great care to attend to it. A true Pakhtun is called *Ghairatee* (*honourable*), and the fundamental principal of Ghairat is keeping one's honour. Whenever some aspect of honour is damaged, it is restored through taking revenge so every true Pakhtun must embrace this need: A Pakhtun will never forget to take revenge, though in some cases revenge is delayed purposefully. There are many Pashto proverbs relating to revenge, which is called *Badal* in Pashto. It has both sides, *Badal* for bad and *Badal* for good. Doing good and doing bad, neither is ever forgotten. There is a proverb in Pashto;

د پښتو کانه په اوبو کښې نه ورستيري

(Pashto Proverb)

(.The stone of Pashto doesn't rust in water)

The psychology of the Pakhtun requires that eventually one will take his revenge on an enemy, even though outwardly he may appear unable to do so. It also means that the Pakhtun's word of honour does not grow old. Generally, in issues of honour, they neither forget and nor forgive. It is this understanding, that you cannot get away with a crime, protects the social order of Pakhtuns. As observers from René Girard have observed, writing of social systems without strong, centralized judicial structures, systems that allow for private rather than public vengeance: a Western-style judicial "system does not suppress vengeance; rather, it effectively limits it to a single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function" (Girard, 1972, p. 15).

Functionally, revenge protects the Pakhtun social order:

Even if revenge behaviour cannot be shown to be individually rational, it might be socially beneficial. Cooperative behaviour might offer an analogy. Although choice of the cooperative behaviour in collective action situations is usually not individually rational, it offers clear social advantages . . . Feuding occurs mainly (although not exclusively) in societies without a strong centralized state. This fact suggests that feuding may serve the role of a legal enforcement system-a code of violence that serves the function of reducing the level of violence below what it would otherwise have been. (Elster, 1990, p. 876)

Regardless of intent, the threat of retaliation discourages potential aggressors. Knowing that revenge is likely, adversaries are more reluctant to intensify conflict than they would otherwise be. (Gould, 2000, p. 684)

In other contexts, particularly in feuding societies, people who seek violent retribution are seen as conforming to social norms; indeed, they are at times goaded into violent acts by kin. Scholars often assert that because revenge in such societies is culturally prescribed, it is locally meaningful in a way that is not transparent to outsiders. (Gould, 2000, p. 682)

No word for “thanks” exists in the Pashto language (although a Persian term

“Mehrabani” {thanks} is in use in Pakistan side of Pakhtunkhwa. Recently, Afghanis have coined an alternate word, *Mannana*, for the term thanks, but it is very recent, a necessary creation to facilitate contact with Westerners. *Mannana* literally means acknowledgment or confession and acceptance. Its infinitive is *Manal*, which means “to accept,” and this is appropriate because a Pakhtun will never forget the good done to him and is bound to reciprocate it at some point. In like manner, revenge will be the inevitable result of a slight or any damage to *Nang*. A traditional saying puts it that

پښتون شل کاله پس بدل واخستو، چې زر نې واخستو

(Pashto proverb)

The Pakhtun took revenge after a twenty years and another said that it was taken soon,)
(.hurriedly

In other words, the need for revenge is never forgotten. Sometimes it is transferred down through the generations. There is a well-known Pashto proverb which will be familiar to Western ears:

بدل په بدل خلاصیږي

(.Tit for tat)

Literally, this proverb says that “Badal ends with Badal”, which is usefully translated as “Tit for tat” because it means that an action elicits or demands an equivalent response. It is worth repeating that the Pashto word *badal*, meaning “exchange” or “reciprocation,” is used in both a positive and a negative sense. When someone owes something to another person, this “debt” is also called *badal*. (See also below, *Por*.) That is, there is also *badal* for gifts or visits, or for bad words, insults, slights or any other action. *Nang* can only be restored by revenge when damaged, that’s why the father of Pashto poetry has said;

څو وانخلي له غليمه انتقام

مرد نه خوب کا نه خوراک کا نه آرام

(Khushal in Kamil, 1960, p. 554)

Unless he takes revenge from his enemy, the real man does not sleep, neither eats, nor)
(.takes rest

Revenge is also called “*Por*” in Pashto which literally means debt. The strongest of debts is that attached to murder. This debt can be family-related, clan-linked or tribal. If payment for the debt is not given, communal or interpersonal taunting will shame the family of the murder victim until it enacts revenge for the dual slight: murder and lack of expiation. Unlike the prescriptions of Islamic culture, familial revenge can be taken by killing any male member of the opponent’s family. In tribal cases, revenge is taken from any male member of the offending tribe. The revenge of a Pakhtun transfers to other

generations, unforgotten with the passing of time even unto scores of years. But “if there is a will, there is a way”, Rogha or Jorha (truce) too is a custom in practice. Eventually after a “badal”, a “rogha” is followed and hence feuds end. Even, instead of real “badal”, in a “rogha”, Pakhtuns accept women or money to abandon their badal sometimes. This code of honour, this tradition of taking revenge is a possible reason for the long periods of peace among Pakhtuns of the tribal areas where there is no law in practice except the social contract of Pakhtunwali. The crime rate is much lower there, compared to the settled districts where the state law is in practice.

One of the major theme of Khushal Kattak’s poetry is *Nang* and he castigates those who do not have a strong sense of honour (Khushal in Kamil, 1960). More to the point, Pierre Bourdieu writes that

Fighting was a game whose stake is life and those rules must be obeyed scrupulously if dishonour is to avoided; rather than being a struggle to the death, it is a competition of merit played out before the tribunal of public opinion, an institutionalized competition in the course of which are affirmed the values that stand at the very basis of the existence of the group and assure its preservation. (1966, p. 202)

In the current global situation, it becomes even more necessary for the world community to understand the honour-bound psyche of the Pakhtun. He and his clan have been living with these traditions for thousands of years. There is a need for change, but the change must be according to his identity, because the Pakhtuns are very serious about their identity and Pakhtunwali is their identity as well as their code of honour. If they are allowed to live with honour, they will never take up arms in any circumstances, since honour is the real purpose of life. The world community must keep in mind that they have never been subjugated by force in any age from Alexander the Great to the invasion of the USSR, now Russia or present day Americans and NATO. In their long history only the British understood them, and that is why the British were the only enemy they would love Pakhtuns. It is a famous saying among the Pakhtun that “A Pakhtun is like a lamb: if you pull him by power towards heaven, he will resist but if taken with love, he will happily go with you even to hell.” The Pakhtun is frugal but generous, and if properly taken into confidence and consulted through the *Jirga*, given surety that his honour will not be harmed and that any already-wounded sense of honour will be restored, then it is possible that he will contribute substantially in any war against extremism being fought on their land—just as The Great Game was once played on their soil. If proper, scientific research is carried out on their culture and traditions, language and literature, only good can come out of it.

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Books recommended for further research

- Pashto and Pashtunwali (in Pashto)

By Muhammad Gul Momand (1948) Reprinted in “ Osani Leekwal” (in Pashto) by A.R. Benawa Vol. 111 (1259-1275), Kabul 1967.

- Pashtunwali (in Pashto)

By Qiyamuddin Khadim, Kabul, 1953.

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This book was originally published in 1956 but we accessed it online and there was no date on it. Under the APA style n.d. stands for no date. Para means paragraph.

Dost Mohammad Kamil edited and compiled works of Khushal Khan Khattak.